DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 134 827 08 CE 010 068

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| TITLE | Minding Your Own Small Business. Final Report. |
| INSTITUTION | Athena Corp., Bethesda, Md. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. |
| PUB DATE | Jun 76 |
| CONTRACT | OEC-0-74-9030 |
| NOTE | 11p.; For related documents see CE 010 065-068 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Business Administration; *Business Education; Business Subjects; *Career Exploration; Course Evaluation; Courses; *Curriculum Development; Management Games; Program Descriptions; Senior High Schools; Simulation; Teaching Methods; Vocational Education |

ABSTRACT

Curriculum development efforts, pilot testing, and recommendations are described for a one-semester course on small business ownership and management at the secondary school level. The entire curriculum was developmentally tested on ten high school students. Revisions were made during and after each session based on student critiques and instructor observations. A pilot test of the curriculum was conducted in the fall of 1975 at a local area high school, which resulted in further revisions. Recommendations made include the following: (1) Implementation: This curriculum should be offered in secondary schools as part of general education programs, not exclusively as a "vocational" course, and preferably not limited to those interested in business or economics. It should be made available to all students, and its description in the course catalogues should make clear its generic nature. (2) Marketing: Given the interest in the curriculum expressed by State boards of education, directors of vocational programs, and secondary school teachers during curriculum development, it is recommended that marketing efforts be directed toward disseminating the curriculum rather than creating a demand for it. (3) Pilot testing: The pilot test conducted was not of sufficient size from which to generalize about the curriculum's effectiveness and usability. Further testing is recommended to establish its validity for widespread use. (TA)

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# MINDING YOUR OWN SMALL BUSINESS

Final Report

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Developed pursuant to Contract No. OEC-0-74-9030

by

The Athena Corporation
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funded by

The U.S. Office of Education
under Part I
Curriculum Development in Vocational and Technical Education
Vocational Education Amendments of 1968, Public Law 90-576

OE 010 068

## Introduction

In June 1974, the U.S. Office of Education awarded a two-year contract to The Athena Corporation for development of a one-semester course on small business ownership and management. The curriculum, Minding Your Own Small Business, is intended to provide students, through experiential learning, with the bases on which to decide whether to become small business owners/managers. In addition, it is designed to give the students the kinds of information and guidelines they will likely remember and use if they become owners or managers in the future. This report describes the curriculum development effort, the pilot test, and our recommendations.

## Development Phases

The first phase of development was a research effort intended to provide us with information upon which to make decisions about the curriculum design. This research involved a review of literature on the state of small business in the United States and on the state of the art of curriculum development for secondary schools; a review of existing curricula in related areas (at secondary, college, and adult education levels); a review of literature on the target population (both students and teachers); and an analysis of our own experience in small business ownership and management. A report on this research[1] was submitted to USOE in February 1975.

Concurrent with the research described above was a subject matter literature search. All available literature, films, and curricula related to small business were reviewed and annotated. Each publication was evaluated as to its usefulness, availability, and general appeal to both students and teachers. In addition, reading levels were determined on several typical publications. The result of this literature search was a bibliography[2] which was submitted to USOE in January 1975.

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[1] The Athena Corporation. Bases for Curriculum Decisions: Secondary School Curriculum on Small Business Ownership and Management, unpublished paper prepared under Contract No. OEC-0-74-9030 for the U.S. Office of Education, 1975.

[2] The Athena Corporation. A Small Business Bibliography, unpublished bibliography prepared under Contract No. OEC-0-74-9030 for the U.S. Office of Education, 1975.

During the design phase, the goals of the curriculum were defined. From these goals, concepts and behavioral objectives were derived. Since most small business failures are a result of poor management, we focused on developing such skills as collection and analysis of relevant information, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Teaching strategies were then designed and developed to reflect the desired behaviors stated in the objectives. One of the major strategies used in the curriculum is a small business simulation game created by Academic Games Associates under subcontract from Athena. The game was designed in three distinct parts, each having a starting and a running segment. Part 1 of the game focuses on finding a location for a business and then determining the correct price for the products of that business. Parts 2 and 3 emphasize business planning and financial management. The game gives the student a chance to apply the information he or she has learned to the student's ability to make good decisions based on the information received in the game and other areas of the curriculum.

The entire curriculum was developmentally tested on ten high school students. Athena personnel acted as instructors during the tryout and revisions were made during and after each session based on student critiques and instructor observations.

A pilot test of the curriculum was conducted in the fall of 1975 at a local area high school. Results of this test are discussed in the following section of this report.

After the pilot test, the curriculum was submitted to Dr. Edgar Persons and Mr. Rodger Palmer of the University of Minnesota for review and comment. Final revisions to the curriculum were made on the basis of pilot test information, Persons' and Palmer's review, and Athena staff appraisal of needed changes. The revised curriculum is being finally submitted to the Office of Education in June 1976.

Pilot Test

In our original proposal to the U.S. Office of Education, we indicated a need for pilot testing at two or more schools. Unfortunately, funding for more than one test site was unavailable. Both Athena and the Office of Education were aware of the problems of collecting reliable data on curriculum effectiveness and usability from one site.

In the fall of 1974, soon after the award of contract, we began our search for a pilot test site. We contacted several school officials and administrators in the immediate area as well as several in other states (including North Dakota, Georgia, and Utah) to discuss the possibility of using their schools to test the curriculum. Almost all of those approached expressed a great deal of enthusiasm regarding the project. However, some sites were not feasible because of distance and those in the immediate area exhibited a definite reluctance to deal with a profit making corporation. A great deal of project time and effort went into the task of finding a pilot test site--time which might have been better spent on curriculum development.

Through the persistent efforts of Elinor Burgess, Coordinator of Distributive Education, Fairfax County (Va.), we finally received in early 1975 a commitment from the Division of Curriculum Services of the Fairfax County School System in Virginia to provide us with at least one class and one instructor in one Fairfax County school. However, the specific site, Mt. Vernon High School, was not identified by the County until March of that same year. By this time, the course catalogue had been printed and distributed and most of the students had already registered for the courses that they would be taking the following semester. As a result, the curriculum did not receive the kind of exposure we wanted and only nine students registered for the course.

In addition to the unusually small class, the instructor assigned to teach the course, while an effective teacher, was not representative of the kind of teacher that would most likely be using the curriculum in the future. He had had extensive experience in running his own businesses but only minimal training as an instructor.

We met with the instructor assigned to teach the course and his immediate supervisor several times between March 1975 and the beginning of the 1975 fall semester. Discussion in these meetings focused on the use of the Teacher's Manual, administration of data collection instruments, and the establishment of a relationship that would allow ease of communication during the course of the project. Following these meetings we sent a letter to the instructor documenting the process for administering the pilot test.

Unfortunately, the data collection process outlined in the Pilot Test Plan was not followed by the instructor as expected; e.g., unit evaluations were not returned to us. In addition, attendance averaged 7.5 students per day, and on 20 days, seven or fewer students were in attendance. (On 10 of those days, no students were present due to sickness and the pre-Christmas vacation syndrome.) On days when attendance was low, particularly days when the simulation game was scheduled, the instructor did not cover the material for the day. As a result, Small Business Simulation Game Part 3 was never pilot tested.

The instructor did keep a daily log and also made detailed comments on his copy of the Teacher's Manual. He indicated where he had encountered problems, where he had used a different teaching strategy than what was suggested, and where he had added examples to clarify the instruction.

Because we did not receive the unit evaluations, we were unable to perform an item analysis to determine whether or not revisions were needed in the presentation of curriculum content. The most consistent information received from the instructor, the students, and Dr. Persons and Mr. Palmer was that the recordkeeping activities in Part 2 of the game were repetitious. Because of that criticism and since the only difference between Part 2 and Part 3 of the game is the addition of community participation activities, the two parts of the game were combined into one as part of the final revisions. This change provides more time for performance of the game and subsequent evaluations and discussion of the concepts applied during performance. All other revisions of the course were based on the reviews by the instructor, Dr. Persons and Mr. Palmer, and our own analysis of the curriculum.

Recommendations

Implementation. Although Minding Your Own Small Business is designed to teach small business ownership and management skills, its application should not be limited to students whose career goals are to become small business owners/managers. After all, doctors, lawyers, homemakers, and others function very much as small business people. Since the curriculum focuses on the development of such generic skills as analyzing, problem-solving and decision-making, it would be useful for all students regardless of career interest or academic program. Therefore, we recommend that Minding Your Own Small Business be offered in secondary schools as part of general education programs, certainly not exclusively as a "vocational" course, and preferably not even limited to those interested in business or economics. It should be made available to all students, and its description in the course catalogues should make clear its generic nature.

Marketing. Given the interest in the curriculum expressed by State boards of education, directors of vocational programs, and secondary school teachers during the development of the curriculum, it appears that a considerable market already exists and need only be tapped. Therefore, we recommend that marketing efforts be directed toward disseminating the curriculum rather than creating a demand for it. Attached is a list of people who have contacted Athena regarding the availability of the curriculum over the past two years. In addition, Fairfax County indicated that they intend to offer the course in their school system in the fall of 1976 if it is available.

Pilot Testing. The Office of Education should provide some support to the contractor with regard to pilot test site negotiations. Schools are not accustomed to dealing with profit making corporations as curriculum developers, and they tend to be very suspicious. Support from OE in identifying likely sites and allaying these suspicions would save project time and dollars.

The pilot test conducted under this contract was not of sufficient size from which to generalize about the curriculum's effectiveness and usability. We recommend further testing of the curriculum to establish its validity

for widespread use. This testing should include several schools and several classes, chosen for their representativeness on the basis of socio-economic, geographic, and cultural variables, and for their willingness to participate and give substantive feedback to serve as a basis for revisions.

The following people have inquired about the availability of the curriculum:

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Ms. Mary Anderson
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Charlene L. Popham, Director
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